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TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

- [1](#). Mideast
- [2](#). Syrian-Lebanese Track

Key stories in the media:

All media, except Yediot and Maariv, led with PM Sharon's efforts to form a new coalition. Leading media reported that Sharon intends to ask Labor Party Chairman Shimon Peres to run the country with him in a new "super-deputy partnership," that would grant Peres vast powers, far beyond those enjoyed by any No. 2 in the past. Ha'aretz quoted senior Likud and Labor Party sources as saying that Sharon and Peres have agreed in principle that if a national unity government is formed, it will last until November 2006 -- when elections are scheduled to be held. The media cited Sharon's portrayal of past cooperation between Likud and Labor, and between their predecessor movements. Ha'aretz quoted Peres as saying Thursday that the year 2005 must be devoted to advancing the diplomatic process with the Palestinians and not wasted on elections and internal party squabbling.

Maariv quoted National Security Advisor and secretary of state-designate Condoleezza Rice as saying this week in a private meeting that the U.S. will increase its involvement in the Middle East, placing an emphasis on the PA election, and that the U.S. will not accept nuclear weapons in the hands of Iran.

Yediot bannered Hamas's mulling over the cessation of attacks against Israel -- a development also reported on by other media. Hatzofe cited a document seized from the Palestinians in Gaza in 2002, which contains the protocol of a secret meeting between Alistair Crook, who was security advisor to then EU envoy to the Middle East Miguel Angel Moratinos, with a Hamas delegation headed by the late Sheikh Ahmed Yassin.

Maariv led with Sharon's declaration at the PM's traditional annual meeting with media editors in Tel Aviv Thursday that Syria will find in Israel a partner for peace if it serious, and that he is prepared to meet with Syrian President Bashar Assad under "certain conditions." All media cited the response of Syrian FM Farouk Shara that Syria is prepared to resume talks with Israel, but without preconditions. Israel Radio quoted State Department Spokesman Richard Boucher as saying Thursday that the U.S. has always supported the idea of comprehensive peace in the Middle East, a notion that Secretary Powell reiterated most recently in his meetings with Shara when they met in Sharm el-Sheikh. Boucher added: "We have always believed that direct contacts between the parties are very important to this process, and so we would encourage any direct contacts that the parties feel it's appropriate to have in order to make progress on comprehensive peace. "

All media quoted Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak as saying Thursday that only Sharon can lead to peace. Ha'aretz reported that Thursday Sharon's bureau played down an announcement from Mubarak on the immediate release of six students from Cairo charged with allegedly planning a terror attack. Writing that the students might be released, Yediot quoted diplomatic sources as saying that the improvement of the atmosphere between the two countries could advance the release of Azzam Azzam, an Israeli Druze who was convinced of espionage and imprisoned in Egypt.

Ha'aretz reported that Industry and Trade Minister Yossi Olmert "did something Thursday that few politicians have dared to do": he declared publicly "that with all due respect to the U.S. Administration, there is a limit to how much Israel will bend to maintain the illusion of good relations." Olmert stood up for the interests of the Israeli pharmaceutical manufacturer Teva and other generic drug makers, as the U.S. insisted on protecting the interests of American companies that develop drugs from scratch -- known as ethical drugs -- and want to delay as much as possible Teva's development of copycat (generic) versions. Although Ha'aretz writer Ora Coren recognized that the ethical drug companies have a justified claim, she sided with Olmert's approach, which she dubbed "an attempt to balance the Israeli drug industry's patent protection interests with those of patients and the state budget."

All media quoted Sharon as saying Thursday that Tanzim leader Marwan Barghouti will remain in jail even if the is elected as Yasser Arafat's successor to head the PA.

Leading media quoted Deputy IDF Chief of Staff Maj. Gen. Dan Halutz as saying Thursday that had the IDF known that assassinating Hamas leader Salah Shehadeh in July 2002 would lead to the death of innocent Palestinians, the operation would not have been approved. Halutz, then commander of the IAF, also explained that his statement at the time that he "slept well at night" was intended to back his subordinates in the IAF.

Israel Radio reported that this morning mortar shells were launched at two Gaza Strip settlements. The station also reported that today south of Jenin IDF troops killed Mahmoud Kmel, a senior Islamic Jihad activist. Yediot (Alex Fishman) reported that, contrary to the impression that the evacuation from the northernmost part of the West Bank will be a minor operation, Israel is examining a plan in which the West Bank would be split in two, and Samaria (the northern West Bank) "closed in like a box." In northern Samaria, the PA would control an area two-and-a-half times the size of that evacuated by Israel in the Gaza Strip.

Israel Radio quoted Palestinian sources as saying that IDF soldiers at roadblock in the Gaza Strip had prevented a Palestinian delegation including Acting PA Chairman Rawhi Fattuh, PA Social Affairs Minister Intisar Al-Wazir, and Yasser Arafat's sister Hadija, from attending the funeral of Arafat's brother Fathi, who died of cancer in Egypt on Wednesday. Israel Radio reported that an Israeli military source denied to AFP that Israel had been apprised of the delegation's travel.

In interviews with several leading media, UN Middle East envoy Terje Roed-Larsen was quoted as saying that the chances of reaching a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are better than ever. Jerusalem Post quoted visiting Spanish FM Miguel Angel Moratinos as saying that the Intifada was a mistake.

Jerusalem Post quoted Israeli officials at the UN as saying that they are pleased that Canada decided to oppose one-sided condemnations of Israel at the UN General Assembly, and that a UN panel recommended that terrorism, even in cases of national resistance, be deemed unacceptable.

Ha'aretz cited the findings of a Tel Aviv University research that every third Israeli has been personally -- either directly or indirectly, through the experience of relatives and friends -- exposed to terrorist attacks, and that every tenth Israeli suffers from a post-traumatic syndrome following the attacks.

Yediot prints an AFP picture of women visiting an exhibition at a cemetery south of Tehran, which includes an alleged picture of corpses of Israelis covered with the Israeli flag, next to a poster with the Hebrew inscription: "Israel must be wiped off the face of the earth."

A Maariv/Teleseker poll:
-"Do you believe the IDF is sufficiently attentive to the protection of the lives of the Palestinians and their respect?" Yes: 53 percent; no: 40 percent.

1. Mideast:

Summary:

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "From Sharon's perspective, there are many positive notes now being sounded in Washington.... If Sharon has cause for concern, it derives from the message expressed by a delegation of senior senators who visited him this week."

Senior Middle East affairs analyst Zvi Bar'el wrote in Ha'aretz: "[On Thursday] Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak described Prime Minister Ariel Sharon as the Palestinians' virtually last hope.... Mubarak's statements were ... a way of 'preparing hearts and minds' for an active Egyptian role in the peace process."

Block Quotes:

1I. "A Solution Is Wanting"

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (December 3): " On Monday, America returned to work after the Thanksgiving holiday. A senior administration official -- of those who call their Israeli colleagues by their first names -- hopped over to New York to outline the new American policy for the Middle East at the prestigious Council on Foreign Relations. Those present at the briefing heard and recorded: 'Whoever believes in a two-state solution cannot support the right of return ... At the end of the process, the settlement blocs will remain in Israel's hands and the rest will not.... The key to progress is to build democratic institutions in the Palestinian Authority and the war against terror, and this depends on the Palestinians.... Israel is not acting with sufficient transparency with regard to the settlements.' These remarks indicate that U.S. President George W. Bush's plan for a final accord is very similar to that of his predecessor, Bill Clinton.... From Sharon's perspective, there are many positive notes now being sounded in Washington.... If Sharon has cause for concern, it derives from the message expressed by a delegation of senior senators who visited him this week.... They explained that, in their view, there is a connection between American successes in one place and failures in another place. Therefore, in order to improve their situation in Iraq and increase public support for American activity there, some success must be demonstrated in the Israeli-Palestinian arena."

II. "Egypt's Seal of Approval"

Senior Middle East affairs analyst Zvi Bar'el wrote in Ha'aretz (December 3): "[On Thursday] Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak described Prime Minister Ariel Sharon as the Palestinians' virtually last hope. The sharp turnabout in Mubarak's public stance toward Sharon did not begin on Thursday.... The details [of Egypt's agreement with Israel] -- particularly the exchange of letters that would enable Egyptian soldiers to be stationed on the Gaza border without amending the Camp David Accords -- had been settled three weeks earlier via American mediation. Mubarak's declarations Thursday are thus a continuation of these official steps. They are meant to give legitimacy to Sharon, but also to Egypt's own diplomatic moves.... Mubarak's statements were ... a way of 'preparing hearts and minds' for an active Egyptian role in the peace process. This role has gone into high gear since Yasser Arafat's death, due to the need to influence the future structure of the Palestinian Authority. However, these statements also reflect an important working assumption: that Egypt believes in Sharon's willingness and ability to implement the disengagement plan.... Egypt is once again playing the role for which it is most suited: Even when it cannot call the shots, it can give them legitimacy. This is particularly important in light of the role that Egypt is expected to play in uniting the various Palestinian factions, as well as in advancing prospects for negotiations between Israel and Syria."

12. Syrian-Lebanese Track:

Summary:

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "While its deniable, privately conveyed, overtures to Israel are plainly motivated by a desire to ingratiate itself with the U.S., Syria remains a major defender and generator of terror."

Block Quotes:

"Larsen's Unlearned Lessons"

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (December 3): "While its deniable, privately conveyed, overtures to Israel are plainly motivated by a desire to ingratiate itself with the U.S., Syria remains a major defender and generator of terror. It may be argued that the abandonment of that behavior is just what Assad wants to discuss. Unfortunately, we have been through this already, with Arafat, 11 years and more than a thousand Israeli fatalities ago.... As long as Syria continues to supply Hizbullah and cheer-lead Hamas, an Israeli readiness to negotiate will be perceived across the Arab world not as rapprochement, but as a form of surrender. Perhaps even worse, Syria is a major wellspring of anti-Semitism, unique even for the Arab world's dictatorships.... [Terje] Roed-Larsen, the UN's outgoing Middle East peace coordinator, may consider that he is offering Israel a farewell gift in encouraging us to take Assad's overtures seriously. He should know better. With all due respect, we will watch Assad's public actions, rather than his efforts at Larsen-facilitated private diplomacy."

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